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CHRISTMAS TREES AND CONSERVATION

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A radio talk by Mr. H. N. Wheeler, United States Forest Service, delivered through Station WRC and 32 other stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, December 24, 1929.

"Jingle of the sleigh bells
Baby feet astir,
Scarlet of the holly,
Green of pine and fir,
Gleam of gilt and silver
Where the candles glow,
Little trees a-glitter
Branches bending low."

Friends everywhere the United States Forest Service brings you greeting. Christmas is at hand. The good things to eat are being prepared; the final shopping is about over, and churches, schools, and homes are being decorated for the great event.

Evergreen trees and shrubbery have been used in the celebration of Christmas so long that the first date is hidden in mystery; and no one recalls when the first blushing maiden was kissed beneath the mistletoe. But now greenery is used wherever Christmas is celebrated.

When the country lies under a blanket of snow and ice and wintry winds shriek and howl through the forest, or chill fog, drizzly rains, and sticky mud, make life less pleasant, then comes Christmas, bringing cheer and good will, stirring us with a desire to greet friends and relatives, and to do something to help those less fortunate. The tree, that best friend to man, of all plant life, cheers up the home, and offers its branches as a resting place for gifts from Santa Claus. In some localities the whole family formerly went to the nearby woods to pick out the family tree, of course. I mean the family Christmas tree. But so many people want Christmas trees, the woods are so far away and do not always belong to us, that this custom has been abandoned, and now, we buy our trees from the farmer or peddler at a roadside stand, or make our selection at the city market.

The best shaped and thriftiest trees along the roadside or in the woods should be left to beautify the countryside or grow into great commercial trees in the forest. If we are friends of the forest we will take the ill-shaped and crowded trees, cutting away the unsightly stems if necessary.

In gathering holly, pine and cedar boughs or shrubs, clip the sprays in such a manner that no permanent injury will result, and more sprays can be harvested next Christmas.

The City of Denver, Colorado, uses about 42,000 Christmas trees each year. A tag placed upon them by the State Forester certifies that the trees

(over)

were removed in thinning the forest where trees were too crowded to make good growth. A tag also is attached by the United States Forest Service to each tree taken from a National Forest. This tag states "this tree brings a Christmas Greeting and was cut not in a destructive way but to give room for neighboring trees to grow faster and better." Denver licenses each Christmas tree dealer, and other cities are following her example.

Much of the trade in Christmas greenery is a local business but in some places is a sizable enterprise. Of the more than 6,000,000 trees used in the United States many come by car, truck, and train load from Canada, New England and the Lake States. Their harvest beginning in October or even in August, brings some return to the farmer or timberland owner who grew them, gives employment to hundreds of people in marketing them, and the trees give joy to millions of people. But no careful survey has been made of the need for trees, and far too often the market is overcrowded, salesmen lose money, and thousands of unsold trees are burned at the city dump. They have served no useful purpose. Even the tree that beautified your home and made the occasion joyous, is often not properly disposed of but is left an unsightly object in back yard or alley.

"Little tree in alleyway
Stark, alone and bare
Reaching out your empty arms
No one near to care."

says the poetess.

Decorated outdoor living trees are being increasingly used to prevent this waste, and evergreen streamers, aglow with colored lights, radiate Christmas cheer from thousands of homes in our cities. Here in Washington the big spruce planted in Treasury Square by the American Forestry Association will tonight and for the whole holiday season attract hundreds to enjoy its shimmering beauty. When the glorious holiday season is over and the Christmas tree is but a remembrance then we can say:

"Dream of hills and winter skies
You have earned your rest;
You have carried Bethlehem's
Star upon your breast."
